

Two of Hollywood's hottest actresses team up for some laughs

IF you've always wished Goldie Hawn weighed another 100kg or Meryl Streep was older and uglier, the black comedy *Death Becomes Her* is for you.

In the movie, directed by Robert (Roger Rabbit) Zemeckis, 42-year-old Meryl wears prosthetic makeup to appear 50 and then very youthful again. She breaks her neck, twists her head backwards, dies, gets smashed by a shovel and becomes a zombie. And 46-year-old Goldie Hawn wears a latex rubber suit for scenes in which her character winds up in a sanitarium with an extra 100kg.

"The latex thing was a real bore," Goldie tells *TV WEEK*. "You were always afraid it would show and then suddenly I was afraid it wouldn't show and people would think I'd really put on all that weight!"

For Meryl — one of the most famous dramatic actresses in the world — *Death Becomes Her* presented some unique challenges.

"It was a different kind of challenge because I've never had to act with my head on backwards," Meryl says with a chuckle. "And I've never got to play a real bimbo before, so it was a sort of exorcism on some level."

Madeline Aston (Streep) is a narcissistic entertainer whose beauty is fading almost as rapidly as her career. Her arch rival is her former relative Helen Sharp (Hawn). Once a shy book editor, Helen has transformed herself into a famous beauty author and is determined to win back the affections of Dr Ernest Menvill (Bruce Willis), a plastic surgeon who dumped her for Madeline.

Both women have an obsessive need to look good and are desperate to try anything to stop ageing, including the ultimate secret weapon they buy from a mysterious guru who promises them eternal youth and immortality — which



COMEDY BECOMES THEM!

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they eventually come to regret. "It's about people who are wrong," says Meryl. "And the further I go with my character's obsession to restore her beauty, the more realistic it becomes — and sort of tragic and funny."

Although Streep was never known for her comedies, she now boasts a string of them — *Postcards From The Edge*, *She-Devil*, *Defending Your Life* and her latest.

"When I started out in drama school, I was known for that sort of comedy," she reveals to TV WEEK. "If you could ever locate the people who were with me in drama school, they'd tell you they were shocked that I had a career known for being more dramatic. I was proud of my early film work, but I just never got comedy scripts. It took a long time for me to be someone that people thought of. They usually sent the comedy scripts to her!"

The "her" to whom Meryl is referring is Goldie Hawn, who was also excited with the chance to play black comedy.

"I certainly have never played a murderess or an insane person or a really fat person or a femme fatale or any of those things before," Goldie says enthusiastically. "That was great to do and it was

uncensored and I was able to fly with a different approach."

Despite their beauty-obsessed characters, the actresses seem happy with their own lot.

Streep says: "My feeling about ageing is that some of my favorite people are over 75 and just as you reject racism or sexism, you can't fall prey to ageism either."

"I've always felt 40. I never felt 16 and adolescent. So I recently have finally felt like myself and been comfortable. Whether that has to do with that self-consciousness that young girls have at being in a culture that requires them to be seen as sex objects or not, now I'm over 40 I feel liberated."

Hawn adds: "It's a natural thing to always want to stay vital and energetic and curious. But I don't believe that getting older stops any of that. It's up to us to try and figure out how we're going to keep that light burning. It's no fun looking in the mirror when you're getting older. My mother sometimes looks in the mirror and says, 'How did I get this old?' because inside she doesn't feel it. We have no choice about ageing — you can either look at it as something natural or as something horrible and I chose the former."

The movie's special effects, rumored to have cost more than \$4 million, are brand new, according to director Zemeckis.

"Particularly with Meryl's head on backwards and the hole in Goldie's stomach," he says. "We had to invent computer graphics and digital imagery."

"The truth is that Goldie and Meryl did a spectacular job because it was hard for an actor to perform with all these effects on parts of their head, neck or body. Meryl had to act from the neck down and we had to have her saying her lines with a bag over her head so we could edit the digitalized swivelling head in later."

Zemeckis was also full of praise for his stars for their willingness to promote the film. "It's important for the opening of a film, especially one like this. I was very glad that the cast came out and worked for it."

"I have a very low tolerance for that kind of, 'I won't talk to the press' attitude. These people should feel grateful that they can get to do this for a living, and be paid the kind of money they get."

Perhaps Streep has more reason to be happier about the film than her glamorous co-star.

"At least I didn't have to wear the fat suit," the heavily-pregnant actress says, adding with a chuckle: "Not until now, anyway!"

From Jenny Cooney
in Los Angeles